

Application No. 10/716,836
Amendment dated August 22, 2006
Reply to Office action of July 6, 2006

Amendments to the Drawings

FIG. 5 is newly added by way of this Amendment. The addition of FIG. 5 does not constitute the addition of new matter as its subject matter is clearly shown in FIGS. 3-4 and described at page 8, lines 9-11, of the application-as-filed.

Remarks:

Status of Claims

Claims 1-8 and 10-24 were previously pending. Claims 1, 5, 13, 22, and 24 are currently amended. Thus, claims 1-8 and 10-24 are currently pending with claims 1, 5, 13, and 22 being independent.

Office Action Summary

In the July 6, 2006, Office Action, the Examiner rejected all claims under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) in view of Kemp (U.S. Patent No. 2,841,255). In a previous amendment, Applicant argued that Kemp does not disclose or suggest “overlapping” lips or “discrete” locking members. The Examiner countered these arguments by defining “overlapping” to mean “occupying the same area in part” and by defining “discrete” to mean being “separate entities.” The amendments herein define overlapping and discrete more specifically to highlight the differences between the claimed invention and Kemp.

Interview Summary

On August 22, 2006, Applicant’s representatives held a telephone interview with Examiner Phi A. Applicant and its representatives wish to thank Examiner A for his cooperation and professional conduct throughout the interview. During the interview, proposed amendments to claims 1 and 13 were discussed along with Kemp FIG. 4. No agreement was reached concerning the claims, but the amendments and arguments made herein correspond to suggestions made by the Examiner during the interview.

New Figure

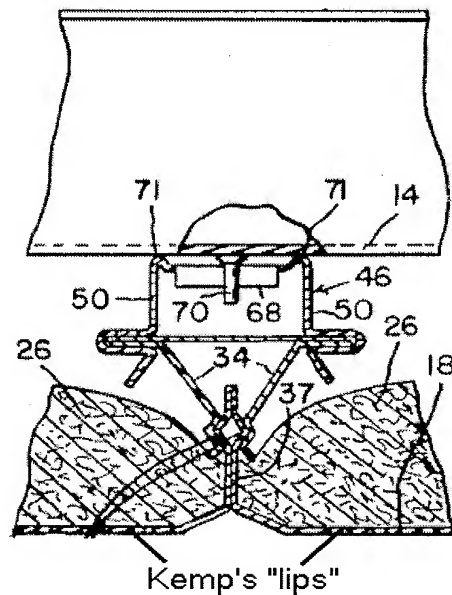
FIG. 5 is newly added by way of this Amendment. The addition of FIG. 5 does not constitute the addition of new matter as its subject matter is clearly shown in FIGS. 3-4 and described at page 8, lines 9-11, of the application-as-filed:

“Where it is desired for one panel 12 to be installed behind another, the forward panel lip 26 is slid under the rearward lip 28 of an adjacent panel and the remainder of the installation procedure is repeated.”

Further, the amendment to the specification that describes newly added FIG. 5 does not constitute the addition of new matter for the reasons articulated above.

Claims 1-12 and 22-24

Independent claims 1, 5, and 22 have been amended herein to recite panel lips that overlap each other “such that at least a portion of the lip rests on top of at least a portion of the corresponding lip.” Support for this feature is found at least at FIG. 3 and page 8, lines 9-11, of the application. As discussed during the telephone interview, Kemp does not disclose or suggest this feature.



Kemp (FIG.4 with annotations)

Kemp, FIG. 4, shown above with annotations, illustrates the lips provided by each of Kemp's panels. Kemp's lips do not overlap each other such that one of the lips rests on top of another. Instead, Kemp's lips merely abut each other.

In contrast, the lips of the present application overlap each other such that one lip is operable to rest on top of at least a portion of a corresponding lip, as shown in FIGS. 3-5 of the present application:

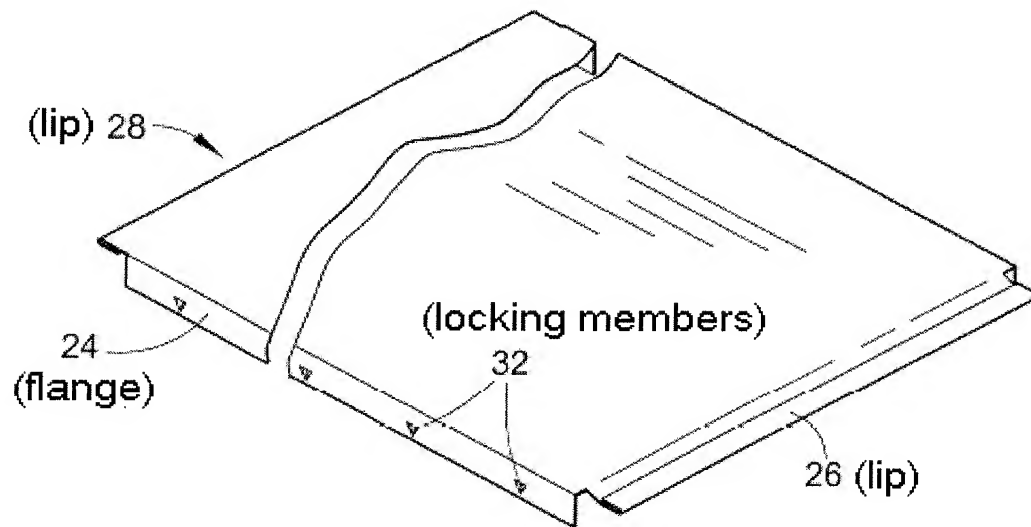
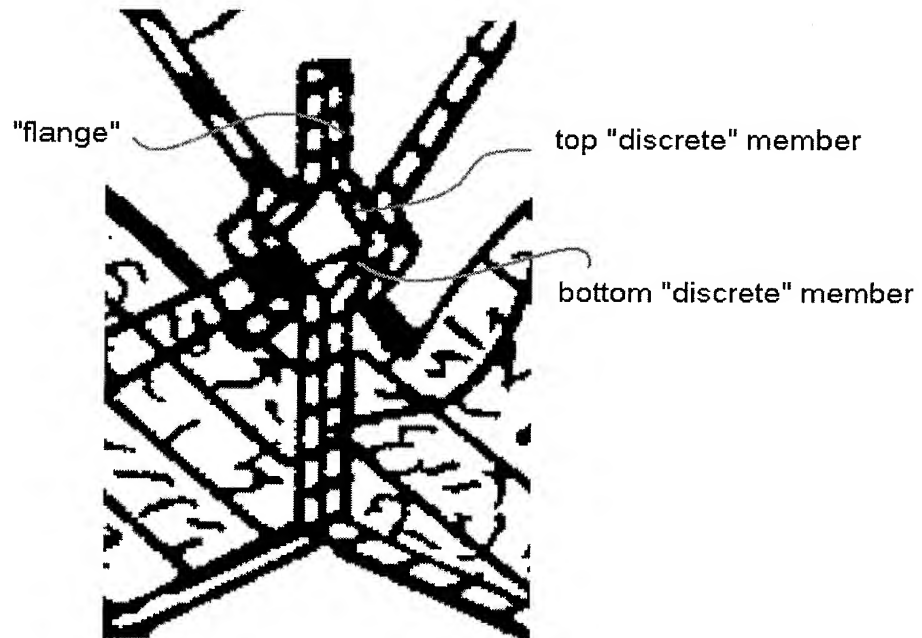


FIG. 3 (with annotations – not to scale)

As shown in FIGS. 3 and 5, the panel lips 26, 28 are offset from each other such that the adjacent panels may be easily coupled together or interlocked by sliding the forward panel lip 26 of one panel under the rearward lip 28 of an adjacent panel — thereby allowing the lips 26, 28 to overlap such that at least a portion of one of the lips 28 rests on top of at least a portion of the other lip 26. Thus, Applicant respectfully submits that claims 1-12 and 22-24 are allowable for at least this reason.

Claims 13-21

Claim 13 has been amended herein to recite a flange having “a plurality of discrete locking members protruding perpendicularly therefrom, at least two of the locking members positioned so as to not directly contact each other.” Support for this feature is found in FIG. 3 and at page 5, lines 5-13, of the application. In the previous Office action, the Examiner contended that the arcuate portion 42, shown below, comprises a top half and a bottom half and thus the two halves are discrete.



Kemp (FIG. 4, magnified with annotations)

Even if the top and bottom half of the arcuate portion 42 are considered to be discrete, they are in continuous contact with each other along the length of Kemp's flange (column 2, lines 47-50 and FIGS. 2 and 4).

In contrast, and as shown in FIG. 3 (reproduced above), embodiments of the present invention include a plurality of locking members where at least two of the locking members are positioned so as not to directly contact each other. As discussed previously, the discrete zones of attachment provided by the plurality of discrete locking members prevent peeling and unzipping

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caused by panel distortion. Thus, Applicant respectfully submits that claims 13-21 are allowable for at least this reason.

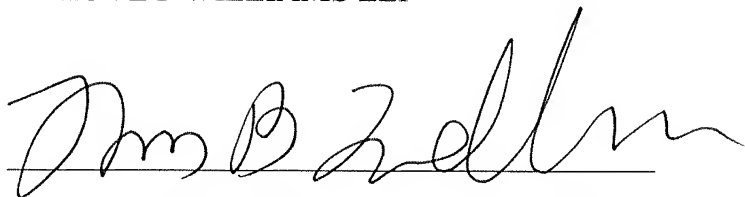
Conclusion

Applicant respectfully submits that all pending claims are in a condition for allowance. In the event of further questions, the Examiner is urged to call the undersigned. Any additional fee which is due in connection with this amendment should be applied against our Deposit Account No. 19-0522.

Respectfully submitted,

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By: _____



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